

Dumi Zondi.
Inanda teacher, 1966-1973; principal, 1974-1976.
Interviewed in Inanda, 14 October 2008.

Let's begin with a bit of background about you. When and where were you born? What was your education like prior to your career at Inanda?

I was born in northern Natal, November 4, 1928. Well, I had my early schooling in the Ladysmith district... Well, I could only be accepted in school if I had two Christian names, if my certificate had to include a Zulu name. So because my father had been born out of a Dudula family—Dudula was my grandfather—and he was sort of chief-related. And then my father thought schooling was good for me because he had had early schooling, and so there was no way out but to say, 'Here is a baby born,' and when a baby is born in our culture he is given a name of the history of the family... So I was called Dumisani—it was a praise because my father had been the only son among eight girls, so when my brother was born, he was referred to and called Hulumeni, which means government. At the time they were expecting to regain control of the government of Natal after the Bambatha Resistance of 1906... So I was a boy born again, therefore I was Dumisani. And we had our early schooling, in those days of course schooling was only offered by the church... My father was a principal of a school in Lucitania, which is one district in Ladysmith.

So you were educated in Ladysmith and did your teacher training where?

I did my teacher training at Mariannhill, after I attended high school at Endaleni. That was where I first had contact with white teachers.

And then, as I understand it, you came to Inanda primarily because of your wife.

Hmm, no, not primarily. I came to Inanda Seminary from Ohlange, it was from a school that I attended at Zwelethu, because I first taught in Zululand, and then later on I taught at Ohlange, then I left Ohlange and taught at a government school [Zwelethu]. After I left that government school I came to teach at Inanda Seminary.

And that was in 1966.

Yeah, well, I came as a casual teacher, and later on as a full-time assistant, early in the 1960s. Well, my first task at Inanda Seminary was to assist in the library. So when I left to teach in Umlazi I had a bursary to study for librarianship at Fort Hare University... following that, then I came to Inanda Seminary, as a teacher, while Miss Scott was still principal at that time. I remember I was a biology teacher and this was my first experience in not just a missionary school, because I had been in Nongoma, but in a girls' school.

How was Inanda different, as a girls' school, from other schools at which you taught?

Well, it wasn't that very different, except that, you know, when you come to a girls' school, you hear all those small voices, and you say 'I need this table moved from here to there,' and you don't have the boys [to help]. But the girls did it, the girls did it. While I was at Ohlange, there was this contact between Inanda and Ohlange; the staff, too, had that... That's how we [he and his wife] met. But it took us some time to get married. We got married after I even came to teach here.

And what year did you marry?

Don't ask me that, it's been too many years... We always leave these things to the women folk.

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Your family lived on campus?

You know that small, two-roomed hovel here?

That's where you stayed?

Yeah. And then I taught, it was okay, until I had to leave. I left for the United States I think in 1970.

Were you studying in the US?

I studied for a Masters in Education at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. And then later on, one of the missionaries who used to visit here offered me a bursary, and she said, 'If you want further studies...' and I said yes, then I went to the University of Pittsburgh later on and studied what they called library and information sciences and then returned to be Assistant Principal to Mr. Aylard.

And that was when?

1972. Because he was planning to go on furlough. *Ja*. Then there were visa problems, the government refused to give him a visa for a return trip.

And that's why he left Inanda Seminary?

Ja, that's right. He wanted to come back, but you know how our government was then. It was through him that I got a lot of experience, handling white people.

[Laughs] Handling white people? What do you mean?

Ja, and coloureds and Indians. As a principal. And even my own people, who had been intellectually colonized, you know, and they wanted me to run the Seminary exactly like the missionaries.

So what were some points of difference that you had with your staff?

Well, I'll tell you one of the things that happened. I encouraged the girls to sing Zulu songs in chapel, and to dance like the gospel singers do. But the first group that I had in chapel, which was led by the late- eh- eh- Buthelezi's daughter, they had a drum, you know, they were beating the drum in chapel. After that, two of my most senior people, staff members, warned me that 'you cannot do this because this has never been done at Inanda Seminary,' because 'Mrs. Edwards,' as they said, 'will wake up in her grave!' [Laughs.]

That's interesting. You had mentioned to me too, yesterday, the troubles around staff members speaking Zulu...

Yeah, that's right. Well, I had my own problems, and probably they were self-created, I don't know, because I didn't have much problems with the African staff, after I had cleared up my principles and beliefs, how Inanda has to be run. Not so much on American lines, but on African lines, because we were Africans in Africa. And we would relate very friendly with all race groups that came here. But let me tell you, when I returned, I had not planned to take over principalship of Inanda. But on my way back I was invited by the Secretary for African Affairs, Church Board for World Ministries, and Mr. Henderson, who was a secretary for Church Board and we spent

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some time with them, and they told me that Inanda was experiencing problems, and they were hoping that I would probably be Mbeki of the place [laughs]. But then, they were so sharp when I told them, look here, I don't know of anything happening at Inanda. They said, 'But your wife is working there, and these things are happening there.' I said to them, 'Look here, when I left I said to her, I'm going to go and study, don't tell me anything, I'm not interested in Inanda Seminary just now...' All I heard was, you know, people who came from here to America and they gave me an inkling of some of the problems and I only promised them that when I get there, I will just monitor the situation, and when you come in three months time, I will tell you the facts as they are. Which I did.

So what were some of the problems?

Well, primarily, administrative. You know, like the whites criticizing the whites, and backbiting the white people and so on. So I told them, 'Look here, I have been friendly with some of these people who have turned against the principal.' So I got down to it, I started working with them nicely, then I had my own problems too, with my own people. *Ja*. I remember two very senior members of my Board of Governors, Rev. Sikakane—well, his was an administrative problem, because he wanted his daughter, who had not properly registered his daughter to be registered. And then I had something too with Chief Buthelezi, who had all his daughters here. And, well, he really bounced on me, it was one morning. He asked me what we were doing here, wa wa wa. I had actually received a letter from one of the members of the KwaZulu government saying that if I didn't expel a certain teacher, I would face trouble and get expelled myself. But I knew the guy, and I had said, he should come and I should tell him what really happened... When Buthelezi turned against me, I also had to reply as a principal... [He confronted Member of Parliament involved, MP apologized, all was well.]

Was Inanda at that time receiving grants from the KwaZulu government?

No. That was much later... We never parted ways with Buthelezi, even up until today, we still meet and we talk.

How many of his daughters attended Inanda?

There were three. Two have died, *ja*.

And they were all here during your time?

Ja.

I'm curious about what you said about trying to develop Inanda as an African institution during your time here. To what extent did it seem that Black Consciousness was something that the students were thinking about?

You see, there were so many organizations. The Black Consciousness, the SASOs, the ANC, the PAC, and so on. Now, most of the people who occupied positions in these organizations had been either my friends or people with whom we had been to school... [Talks about his youth, story about a cow, an elderly black man, and an abusive white dipping inspector.]

Among the students when you were here, did it seem that there was a lot of interest in SASO?

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At the time, that's right. The kids got interested, and they had to get interested. Because it was not only a new thing, it was what they saw happen, you see. It was what they saw happen even at Inanda Seminary, each time some of the visitors came, they said, 'Oh, you come here, come here, let's take pictures of you!' And then the girls realized it afterwards, and they said, 'Hey, what are your pictures for?' Because, now, they had read, in some of the books, you know, I think there was one book, which I thought I had removed from the library, *ja*. The book had this title: *The Raw Material and What We Can Make it Become*. And there was a picture of a man near his kraal with his three or four wives and many children, and then below was a picture of a minister of religion, I knew, you know, very well dressed, now, indicating that, you know, we were so raw that we deserved to be preached to this way. Now, at that time, you see, you wouldn't have information like that running around. But, you see, the consciousness which drove people like Steve Biko here from the University and then the leader of the PAC and so on, all those people talked one kind of language, and they were teachers, and there were clubs at the time... and, well, I also had to remove what I saw and realized was this kind of racial superiority here. And we had some very good, three young women teaching here... [One called him a racist for saying that he needed to check their registers on behalf of the 'white man' in government.] I said to her, 'Oh, boy. You are not a racist now that you are talking that language? You were sitting down there now, waiting for a ride, so that you could go into the city, and walk into the whites-only areas? I told these young ladies, look here, you leave at 5 pm and come here on a Monday, but all weekend, you go to all these places where it says whites-only, now what is that? You don't do that when you're at Inanda Seminary, but you do it when you go there.' So the lady says, 'Anyway, Mr. Zondi, still you are a racist.'

Were these American women?

No, they were South African women. But incidentally, you know, later on, you know, this lady who talked to me like this, on behalf of the other two, she decided to go and teach at Ngoye University [University of Zululand], which was strictly a black man's university. And she did very well... But, I mean, when people are born in a situation where black is black, Coloured is Coloured, Indian is Indian, you know, white is white, you get all those things, and these are the experiences that I went through. You can imagine, you see, because I was born during the times that the British were in charge, until Smuts was overthrown and the Dutch were in charge... so I just understood what was happening. Even when I got to Ngoye I had a similar experience, because I had to be in charge of the university library.

Sorry— this is after your time at Inanda?

Yes. So when I got there, you know, it couldn't be believed that I could run a section of the institution and be head over white people. And when I got there I was told that the library was in shambles and that people had to have tea differently, and I didn't mind all that... I said, no, I am going to the job that I accepted... So then two of my white staff members decided to leave the very month I came, yeah, because tea had to stop.

Tea always seems a very contentious issue in South African history, I've found, in terms of integrating institutions...

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[Laughs.] But you know, people couldn't believe it, you know, when I said, I am not going to have tea this way... when they brought me tea, I drank the tea, and then I heard all this talking and laughing. I finished the tea, and I took the cup, and I went to see where the laughter came from. It turned out it was whites only. So I asked how the tea was organized here, and then one of the ladies said, oh no, the Bantus have their own tea, we don't know where, and we have ours here. I said to the guy in administration, I can't have this. We have to stop... and then we decided to organize it. And I said to tell all the staff, tomorrow we will have tea in one of the rooms upstairs... When I entered, there were two groups: The white people, drinking tea and talking; the black people, drinking tea and talking. I went to the end, poured my tea, and I went straight to the white group, and sat among them. The conversation slowed down... Later on there was improvement... Some of these things are latent in us because of how we grew up; I grew up not liking white people... So, even in the institutions that I went through, this observation [of racism] came. So that by the time that Inanda Seminary came under my hands, you know, I wasn't as explosive as probably I'm talking now, I was really a quiet fellow, yeah, but always asking questions, you know, and rejecting...

So how was Inanda Seminary different in terms of the level of staff integration and such, as opposed to the other institutions at which you worked?

No, no, no. It, Inanda, was equally guilty, because it practiced racism. You see? Before there were changes, you know that black people had their own dining room next to the girls' dining hall. They [white and black staff] only had tea together during the day. And when, each time we had a visit, before I came here, we had tea, and we thought Inanda was great. But they had different food, different cooks.

When did things change?

Well, they changed, let me say... all I remember is that when Dr. Chester Marcus, Secretary for UCBWM, came here, *ja*, we had a motion, on this table, that they should start letting people cook together, eat together, and so on... All I'm trying to indicate is, because of the circumstances of the times—and I used to take the girls out to reasonable meetings, like they go to the Medical School to see, those who wanted to attend medical school, and those who believed in the religious organizations. Fatima Meer, the popular lecturer at the University—

Yes, I saw that you started a journal with Fatima Meer—I want to talk about that journal later.

Ja, that's right. OK, she was a great friend. She used to invite the girls. But the girls were so sharp, that when they had the meeting, like the Mother's Union, the girls used to tell them so many things, until Fatima and one of the secretaries came and they said, 'What do you do to these girls? They almost took over the meeting, the leadership.' But it was because of allowing them freedom to say what they want and how they feel, and that was the whole thing. We never handled a stick here. Even to be scolding girls—well, you know, in our culture, if you don't listen, you listen because I take a stick and I hit you. But at Inanda Seminary we never did that. At Inanda we reasoned with the child. You reason with the child, and the child will realize she is wrong. If she doesn't realize she is wrong, she will say, 'No, I am not happy.' And this is what happened when we had a joint meeting of the different high schools around, organized by Dr. Gumede and some of the University of Zululand lecturers, on the drugs. I remember that one girl got up and said, 'Look

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here, you say, if I have a *zol* of *dagga* and I am caught, I am going to pay such a lot of money, and if I have a bottle of beer I can just drink it—nothing—why?’ Well, the lecturers tried to explain; Dr. Gumede, who was then in charge of an alcoholic clinic, Dr. Gumede tried, and the girl still stood up and said, ‘No, I am not satisfied’—until the local magistrate at Umlazi got up, and he said, ‘Look here, I’m not going to answer this in my position as magistrate, but in the way I personally see it. You pay so much for that *zol* when you are arrested, but when you buy a bottle of liquor, there is no problem, because already, in that bottle of liquor, you have paid some kind of VAT, but for the *dagga*, you don’t pay any!’ And they all got up and clapped hands, and the girl said, ‘Thank you very much.’ Now, I’m trying to indicate what it means to allow somebody to be free to say what they think, and then engage them in some kind of friendly talk—maybe you are not as correct as he is. For instance, I do some of the things here [at the school archive], and I get some of the girls saying, ‘Why don’t we do it this way, why don’t we do it this way?’ And then I listen to them, and I see the thing coming up right. Yeah. So, this is how I have taken even the politics of the country. I should have been in many political organizations, according to how people keep on asking you—oh, no, no, no. I say, no. Because you are a party member of this group, you hate this group, you hate that group. And yet, we are all human beings. We work together with one goal. ‘If somebody comes with something progressive, because it comes from party so-and-so, no.’ But I don’t think this is how we should handle things, even in the country here. Because—you know—many people in some of the schools will envy Inanda because we do so many things together, we laugh together, and the whole thing is planned and there is inter-cooperation. But it was not so before. Look at some of the minutes I have down here. There were minutes where it was said that on such-and-such a day there was going to be a white staff meeting, and things were decided, and taken. The black people were told. But we have sort of hand an evolution from that, and we are ready for a good South Africa. So it happened, *ja*. And now we are talking about Inanda, although I have diverted, just to indicate my kind of thinking, *ja*, how I have quarreled even with people like Buthelezi and so on—but even today, we will meet here, and he will shout at me, we have had some quarrels, not just small ones—but because it is that item only where we differ, it is where we agree that matters. So at Inanda Seminary I have had that experience, and it has made me what I am in my final days. Now you come here—before it wouldn’t happen, you come here, you talk to me about this school where I have made some contributions. And so we have moved on. Anything else?

Again, I was curious about that journal—the Institute for Black Research? Was that journal involved with Inanda?

Well, it only involved with Inanda because I had been a founder-president of the Institute for Black Research, and Fatima was my secretary, and this was one of the first journals we thought would let us have some brief information... We finally ended up closing, and some of the material was taken and never returned, because what we were doing there was researching on the lives of black people, black institutions and so on...

Perhaps we should stop for today—I’ll bet you are getting tired. Thank you.
Thank you. [He then shows me his collection of photo albums.]